

Supply

this sense, the approach taken here is similar to that taken by the Opposition throughout this debate, pose a loaded question and then proceed to make the facts fit the premise.

The Opposition alleges failure to provide full and satisfactory information, yet provides no yardstick against which to measure the phrase "full and satisfactory". Are we to presume that this is to mean what the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) says it means or what the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) says it means or what the Press Gallery says it happens to mean? The approach taken is reminiscent to that taken in Lewis Carroll's—

Mr. Althouse: Charles Dickens, a Christmas Carol?

Mr. Hnatyshyn: —when he referred to Humpty-Dumpty. He said:

When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.

However, in the case before us, not only has the Leader of the Opposition established his own definitions for the words "full and satisfactory", but he refuses to tell us what they are.

The Opposition complains of non-compliance with its standards only after the conduct about which it complains had taken place. There is a principle at law, Mr. Speaker, that conduct cannot be sanctioned retroactively. Yet that is precisely what the Opposition is attempting to do in this case. You may agree or disagree with the provisions and appropriateness of the Code of Conduct, just as you may agree or disagree with any other codified standard of behaviour, but surely even if you disagree, it is unfair in the extreme to pillory someone for meeting those standards. In such circumstances, instead of attacking the individual, the Opposition's energy might better have been directed toward suggesting improvements to the Code. Regrettably, and to the Opposition's discredit, it has not yet seen fit to do so.

[Translation]

It is absolutely unfair to proceed the way they have been proceeding, because they gave their tacit consent to the Code. Now they think they can get some political mileage out of it, they have decided to add a new, imaginary chapter to the code.

Ministers are obliged to conform to the rules as they exist today. As for the imaginary rules of the Opposition parties, we have been waiting for them since February 9, 1985.

[English]

I might also say that if a charge is going to be advanced, one should always keep in mind that the reputations of public figures are hard won but easily lost. While the fact of parliamentary immunity makes it very easy to allege misconduct, such an allegation ought not to be made lightly.

I am sure that we are all aware of examples where the stigma of wrongful accusation endures long after it has been proven groundless. That is why it is appropriate that such charges be made only on substantive motions where the Member carrying the motion has the burden of proof and the

House is provided with an opportunity to decide the question. The motion before us today has neither of those two fundamental prerequisites.

In reflecting upon the events of the last week, I have become concerned that this Parliament has been diverted from the essential issues facing the nation. Unfortunately, although this diversion has occurred, it will not result in a constructive outcome. That time could have been spent considering issues as varied as the Tokyo Summit, efforts to improve economic returns to farmers, the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, the ongoing scourge of terrorism, or any number of other important issues. It might even have been spent considering what changes, if any, could be made to the conflict of interest code to improve its effectiveness. In doing so, we would have been fulfilling the role for which we were elected. We would have been dealing with the important issues of the day in the context of the fundamental directions charted for this Parliament, that is, national reconciliation, enhancement of social justice and economic renewal.

• (1220)

My colleague the Minister performed an honourable act today in tendering his resignation. I am disappointed that, under the circumstances, the speeches made by the Leaders of the two Opposition Parties did not recognize that fact and were not supportive of the Minister who has taken this very important step.

Mr. Deans: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member seeks to ask a question. The Chair had not called for questions on the first speech, therefore did not call it on the second speech, and therefore intends to move to the next speaker.

Mr. Deans: On a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order, the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans).

Mr. Deans: Mr. Speaker, it is not the Chair's prerogative but, rather, a Member's prerogative to rise and indicate the desire to ask a question. If no Member rose and indicated that desire in the first two speeches, that should not in any way interfere with my right to ask a question.

Mr. Speaker: The point of order is on the Hon. Member's side and I agree with him. What the Chair is trying to point out is that the Chair normally calls the question and answer period and did not earlier. It therefore left the Chair in the position where it would have had to interrupt the Hon. Member's Leader to come back to a question and answer period. The Hon. Member is absolutely correct on the point of order, therefore, if he wishes to continue with his question?

Mr. Deans: Yes, quite frankly I want to ask a question. It is a simple question. Why is the Government House Leader now defending the conflict of interest position of the Minister when